

John 20: 1-18
He is Risen Indeed

Their meager breakfast of pita bread and goat cheese was interrupted by the sound of a woman crying. Even through the anguish and emotion, Simon and John immediately recognized it as the voice of Mary Magdalene, the one whom Jesus had healed early on in his ministry. Looking at each other with a mixture of sadness and anger, they were unsure of what to do next. In their minds Jesus was dead; the time for crying was over and people needed to get on with their lives. There were bills to pay, fishing nets to mend, and little time for dwelling on what they should have, would have or could have done different to prevent their friend from dying a few days earlier. So, you imagine their reaction when they heard the latest bit of bad news. In between her sobs of grief, Mary managed to spit out the words- someone has taken Jesus body from the tomb. Their hearts fell, and the plans they had made that morning were changed in an instant.

Can you imagine Peter grabbing his sword, swearing to find the people responsible? They run towards the tomb and John gets there first. Peering into the tomb in the morning fog he finds that Mary is right- no Jesus. Expecting the aroma of burial spices and decomposing flesh he sees nothing there but a pile of linen strips that once wrapped the body of his best friend. Just then Peter arrives, shoves John out of the way and storms into the tomb. He didn't know what to make of what he saw either. The neatly rolled burial shroud just didn't fit with the scattered pieces of linen strips used to wrap Jesus body. Why in the world would someone do this? Who in their right mind would unwrap the corpse, throw the strips of linen in a pile, neatly roll up the burial shroud and then steal the battered and bruised body of their friend, this one who was beaten and spit upon a just a few days earlier?

Gathering his composure, John takes a deep breath and enters the tomb next. He observed the same thing Peter did, but it appears his reaction was different. The Bible records in verse 8 that he saw and believed. The unanswered question is what he believed, especially since the next verse reveals that they did not yet understand the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Even more telling is verse 10- then the disciples returned to their homes.

John believed Jesus had risen, and perhaps Peter did also. But despite what they had seen, they returned to their homes. It seems believing that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and understanding what it meant are two different things. Did they understand that because Jesus rose from the dead one day they too would also rise from the dead? Did they understand that because Jesus rose from the dead they would no longer be bound to the sin of their unbelief? Did they understand that because Jesus rose from the dead, they now had an opportunity to have new life in Christ? If they did understand those things, why did they return to their homes instead of taking to the streets and shouting “He is risen” at the top of their lungs? That is not just a question for Peter and John.

Mary was not content to stay at her home. She wasn't about to give up until she found out where Jesus was. Heading back to the tomb, she continued her search for the truth, and she could not rest until she knew for certain what had happened to Jesus. Her efforts did not go unrewarded. Reaching the cave, she expects to find Peter and John, but they are nowhere to be found. Imagine her reaction as she peers inside and sees two angels sitting where Jesus cold and battered body once laid.

Woman, why are you weeping? It was a strange question to say the least. Cemeteries and weeping go together like peanut butter and chocolate. Do you wonder if Peter and John asked her the same question earlier that morning? She hears the question yet again, but this time it is from someone standing outside of the tomb. Woman, why are you weeping? Thinking it was the caretaker of the garden, she pressed on for the truth. Sobbing uncontrollably, she asks the question. Where is he? Tell me where he is. Sensing her desire to know the truth, Jesus answers her in a single word. “Mary”. In other words, I am right here.

It wasn't until she was asked “why are you weeping” for maybe the twentieth or thirtieth time that Mary finally recognized Jesus. The final time was by Jesus Himself. “Why are you weeping”? It seems Peter and John were right, even though they didn't know it at the time. The time for crying was over. The presence of the risen Christ had changed everything. His resurrection changed everything and continues to change everything.

Because of His resurrection we can face our own mortality, and close our eyes knowing that one day Jesus will raise us up to be with Him. Because of His resurrection, weeping will one day come to an end. We can grieve the death of a friend or loved one in hope of seeing them once again, minus the pain and taint of sin that clouds our relationships. Because of His resurrection the next time we meet it will be in perfection.

Jesus is risen and risen indeed. The evidence is convincing- there is no good reason to doubt it is true. The disciples and numerous others saw the resurrected Jesus on multiple occasions after his death. Thomas placed his hands in Jesus wounds and finally believed that He was alive. And today we see lives radically changed as people confess Jesus as Lord. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. Not only did He rise from the dead, He chose us to rise with Him. He is the resurrected and the Resurrector.

The apostle Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2:4-6. Jesus rose from the dead and He chose us to rise with him. Certainly, nothing we have done or will do merits that kind of love. He chose us to rise with Him to demonstrate His love for us through His grace and to cause us to praise and glorify him now and in the ages to come. May we celebrate and remember that love again this morning, as we shout it from the mountaintop- He is risen! He is risen indeed! Lord, as we celebrate your resurrection and anticipate our own, draw each of us nearer to you as we share in this special meal together. Amen